

Stewardship of the Land

S. GRIFFITH / DNR

Forests & Fish Rules

"With the new Forests & Fish rules, the people of Washington can be proud that we have the highest level of environmental protection for forests in the U.S. These rules show that the traditional choice between harvesting and environmental protection is a false choice and that the mosaic of Washington's forests can provide opportunities for responsible harvesting, ecosystem protection and recreation."

— Commissioner Doug Sutherland

With the beginning of July, non-federal forest owners across Washington began managing their forestlands to a new set of standards designed to protect salmon and clean water while maintaining a strong forest products industry. These new standards, known as "Forests & Fish," were adopted by the legislature in 1999 and finalized by the Forest Practices Board earlier this year.



J. JOHNSON / DNR

Photo top: Deer Park residents plant an arboretum funded by a DNR Community Forestry Assistance grant.

Photo bottom: The Spruce Dome fire west of Yakima showed that overstocked forests are vulnerable to wild-fire. The fire blazed quickly in densely stocked areas, but slowed where the forest had been thinned.

Adoption of these rules helps achieve four important goals.

First, it provides habitat protection for wildlife and fish in forested areas across Washington State. The rules protect streams, provide habitat protection and ensure that harvests play a complementary role in the living mosaic of Washington forests.

Second, it provides assistance for family forest owners. They will have the opportunity to take advantage of programs designed to keep these lands in forestry while providing important environmental protection. Additionally, to provide assistance to these families, the Forests & Fish legislation set up the Small Forest Landowner Office.

Third, it responsibly protects an important part of our economy and way of life. Forestry is a part of Washington's history and economy that will continue to play a positive role for our state.

Fourth, the rules can be adapted in response to new information and new science. As we learn more about ecosystems and protection of habitat, the guidelines will adapt to match our expanded knowledge.

Thanks to the good work of the Forest Practices Board and the staff at DNR, the new rules were adopted prior to the legislatively-mandated deadline and private foresters began implementing these new rules on time.

Forest Health

"Healthy forests play an important role in healthy ecosystems. Unhealthy forests mean not only dead trees and loss of value for school construction, but loss of wildlife habitat and, as we saw in 2001, dry, fire-prone forests which spread fires quickly."

— Commissioner Doug Sutherland

In many of the forests in eastern Washington, insect infestations have seriously impacted previously

healthy forests. These large infestations affect more than 800,000 acres of forestland from the Columbia River to Canada.

This infestation is, in large part, due to forests that have grown out of balance over time because of a variety of forest practices dating back two centuries. Over time, many of the stands in eastern Washington have become overstocked. The combination of overstocked stands and the damage caused by insects and diseases not only stunts the growth of these forests, but also creates abundant forest fuels which change the forest fire pattern from the low-intensity fires of the past into large, damaging wildfires.

With so many acres of state forestland burned this summer, we face the real threat of losing value in fire-killed timber to insects and the fungi they carry. After a tree is killed by fire, it is almost immediately attacked by insects and the process of degradation begins. The longer it is before the tree is harvested and processed, the more loss of value occurs.

Working with our experts in forest health and wildlife habitat, DNR began harvesting fire-killed trees. In each sale the largest trees and snags, and some of the fire-killed timber, are left for nesting opportunities for birds, wildlife use, and to start the next generation. Quick replanting helps ensure that these forests return sooner than they would otherwise.

We are replanting so that when they mature, the forests of eastern Washington can again be healthy forests that resist insects and serious wildfire and offer habitat for animals and recreation for people.

Returning our forests to a healthy state is crucial to maintaining healthy ecosystems, preventing catastrophic wildfires that threaten homes and communities, and giving generations to come healthy, green forests to enjoy.

Public Use/Abuse

"Public lands are for the public, and I will do everything I can to keep access to these lands open. With the help of the people of our state and the simple credo that we should leave our campsite better than we found it, we can continue to give millions of people the opportunity to enjoy them."

— Commissioner Doug Sutherland

During the summer of 2001, DNR investigators found a large methamphetamine lab in the Tahoma State Forest near Mt. Rainier. It ranks among the largest found in a state forest, with toxic materials scattered across fifteen acres. The chemicals left behind, such as ammonia and battery acid, are not only damaging to the environment but can be extremely harmful to anyone who comes across them.

Unfortunately, the problem continues to grow. The number of meth labs found each year has doubled in each of the past three years and dealing with them costs the Department of Natural Resources more than \$100,000 annually.

While meth labs are the most challenging and potentially dangerous problem these lands face, it is not the only one. There are many examples of abuse of recreational areas across the state.

Recreational vehicles sometimes leave trails and other designated areas, straying into wetlands and other important habitat areas. Irresponsible shooting leaves its mark on road signs, trees and other places in our forests, and it puts lives at risk. Volunteer camp stewards have quit due to the level of random shooting.

Fortunately, the vast majority of recreational users are responsible and considerate. Growing numbers of people visit and enjoy state forests and often after a holiday weekend there is little evidence of their visit. But with so



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Students in North Mason School District are among the volunteers helping DNR. Their research, monitoring and stewardship projects have saved DNR thousands of dollars.

many people visiting state forests and trails, the problem grows each year.

The Department of Natural Resources has made this issue one of our top priorities. There are many things we are doing to solve the problem.

In the case of the meth lab in the Tahoma State Forest, we had to close 26,000 acres to find the extent of the chemical contamination and to protect hikers and others who may come across it. That, however, is an extreme and rare instance.

DNR works with many recreational groups, including horseback riders, hikers, motorcycle riders and others. They have been very receptive and helpful in supporting plans that protect the forest while allowing responsible use. Those who use the forest can be the best friends we have in this effort.

The Department of Natural Resources also received legislative help to increase the level of enforcement in state forests and at trailheads. In 2001, the legislature provided needed help by adding additional funding for enforcement.

This combination of additional enforcement and conscientious use by the public will go a long way to making our forests safe and enjoyable places to spend time. The simple rule that you leave your campsite and forest better than you found them will keep them that way.